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SUBJECT: MALAWI: PRESIDENT MUTHARIKA SLATED FOR AU CHAIRMAN

REF: KINSHASA 826

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In the communique from its September 7-8 summit, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) endorsed Malawi's candidacy for chairman of the African Union (AU) (reftel). Barring unforeseen events, Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika is set to be elected chairman of the AU Assembly at the summit set for January 2010. Mutharika has not yet laid out a plan for his potential AU chairmanship, though food security has been at the top of his domestic agenda. End summary.

¶2. (U) In the communique from its September 7-8 summit held in Kinshasa, SADC endorsed Malawi's candidacy for AU chair. GOM Ministry of Foreign Affairs AU Desk Officer Gloria Bamusi confirmed that Malawi actively sought the endorsement, contesting successfully against Lesotho. She added that because it is SADC's turn in the regular rotation of the AU chair, the organization's nod in Kinshasa makes President Mutharika's selection likely at the next AU summit to be held in Addis Ababa in January 2010. Bamusi told us the agenda for President Mutharika's chairmanship was still under development.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Increasing food security through agricultural input subsidies has been at the top of President Mutharika's domestic agenda and may become a central theme of his prospective AU Presidency. Set to complete his second and final term as Malawian President in 2014, Mutharika may view his year as AU chair as an opportunity to burnish his legacy as an African statesman. Mutharika served a controversial stint as Secretary General of the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) from 1991-1997, and also worked for both the United Nations and World Bank earlier in his career.
SULLIVAN